**Week One Lecture: Psychology as Science** (or Thinking Like a Psychologist)

Psychology is a scientific approach to explaining the causes of behavior. We are not learning David Myers's (the author of the text) or Bob Riesenberg's (your instructor) view of how people should act or solve their problems. Our text is an overview of the academic discipline of psychology, its current state of knowledge, its methods for acquiring new knowledge and testing ideas, its major issues, and uncertainties. Understanding the information in our text is one of our major tasks for this course. Learning to think like a psychologist when considering the causes of behavior is a second major goal. Developing the skill of accessing psychological knowledge as it develops in the future is a third goal.

Psychologists are critical thinkers; nothing is accepted automatically and everything is open to investigation. You will notice in reading the text's Introduction that the focus is not on learning facts, but rather becoming aware of the major issues and controversies in studying behavior, e.g. nature-nurture. Chapter 1 focuses on psychologists' ways of forming questions and seeking answers through the scientific method. Every idea and conclusion in this text has been scrutinized with the state-of-the-art methods of research. This means that the information in it has its basis in studies that attempted to keep the researcher's opinions out of the conclusions, and to let the data gathered speak with a minimum of human bias. Each conclusion is based in a study that you could locate and read for yourself. This is why the text has over 3000 references cited (see the reference section at the end of the book). Each idea has one or more names and dates following it. This tells the reader that the idea came from the work of the individuals cited. By looking in the reference section for those names and dates you will find the publication and page numbers of the original authors' report of their research. This is one of the basic principles of a scientific discipline - let everyone have access to the methods used to formulate the knowledge. Then everyone may look for fallacies and attempt to improve the objectivity of the knowledge. This makes reading the text more cumbersome until you become accustomed to it. However, it is necessary to be true to the spirit of the effort to understand our universe in an objective fashion, rather than try to sway your opinions to those of an individual or group.

However, this also is a view of the world with its biases and values. It is biased toward rationality and away from emotion. It is biased against information that cannot be reproduced and scrutinized by others. The scientific view of human behavior is not the only way to view the world.. Some believe that there can be no true science of human behavior because people have a completely free will as individuals and cannot be predicted or categorized. Others believe that life is a battle between good and evil, and therefore science cannot explain why we behave as we do because there are unseen forces affecting us. Others believe that the scientific method requires the big picture of human behavior in the world to be broken down into such small pieces that it becomes meaningless. They say no behavior may be understood when it is removed from its context. For example, we could study your reasons for going to college or taking a cybercourse and identify many factors influencing your decisions. We may find that you aspire to a better job, enjoy working on a computer, and have above average intelligence. We may be able to predict with some degree of accuracy who is likely to go to college and who is likely to take a cybercourse. But of what value is this when the decision to go to college has arisen out of a society's values, your struggle for financial resources, your battle with time to get it done, and your uncertainties about your future and whether you made the right decisions? Also, the experience of those who want to go to college and fail to find the resources of time, money, and energy is not covered in looking at who goes to college.

Science can only describe part of the human experience at this point in time. It takes pieces of our lives and tries to understand how they work. After may pieces have been studied and explained, it attempts to put those pieces together to make a picture and see the whole experience. But we never have all the pieces, and there is always controversy about the accuracy of the pieces we do have. For example, which prisoners should be paroled and which should be held longer? Which mental patients should be returned to the community and which kept in confinement? We can do better than chance in these predictions, but we obviously are not right all the time as some former prisoners return to criminal behavior and some former mental patients have committed harmful acts against others. And there are likely individuals still confined who would not harm anyone if turned loose, but their "data" puts them in the wrong categories.

So science is an imperfect and evolving study of behavior as well the rest of the universe. We humans are attempting to explain the laws that govern our universe, and the scientific method is one of our tools. Along with the technology that evolves from science, it has produced dramatic results so far, including reduction in disease, increase in food production, space exploration, and the computer you are working on right now. It has also led to the greenhouse effect, increasingly overpopulation of the planet, and nuclear weapons. Science is a mixed blessing and curse. But we continue to pursue it in hopes of creating a more problem free and interesting world for ourselves. We have learned that everything is related; humans cannot go forth serving their own interests without paying attention to their effect on the other processes in the ecosystem. Psychology is a part of this whole scientific endeavor. It has great benefits and weaknesses. Our goal in this course is to become familiar with the discipline by studying a sample of its accumulated knowledge, understanding how that knowledge is derived, and learning how to keep abreast of the developments in the future that may have relevance to our lives. It's going to be a very interesting quarter together as we learn about and discuss this discipline.

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